The old adage, “You never get a second chance to make a good first impression” is so appropriate when thinking about the opportunity to convert a first-time caller into a loyal patient. The first minute of the call can make or break the relationship.

A shared goal
Let’s face it, when you pick up the phone and talk to a potential new patient, the practice wants a certain outcome and so does the caller. The team wants to schedule a caller for a non-apartment appointment and caller wants to feel they have found a place that will satisfy their dental and emotional needs.

Because the practice and the patient both want positive results, this should be simple. Unfortunately that is not always the case.

First, may I ask your name?

“Obviously the caller will want to listen more intensely than typical. Yes, doctor, what issues are you concerned you?"

Stay on course
When a patient calls in with specific questions like, “Who are you here?” or “Do you see emergency cases?” it’s not unusual to fall into the trap of answering the direct question without even stopping to ask the caller’s name.

That’s an easy mistake to make if you are trying to be helpful and informative, but the ultimate goal of the call must be centered on creating the relationship. Better still, answer the implant question with more than a yes. Instead say, “The good news is you have made the right decision to call, because our dentist does wonderful work with implants. Our patients love their results and you will, too.”

Referral recognition
Once you have introduced yourself and the patient has done the same, ask, “Would you share for referring you now?”

This is always a good way to acknowledge comorbidities between you and the patient, as well as set the precedent with the new patient that your practice is focused on ambas-
dates of the practice. This also allows you to track the Return on investment on any of your marketing opportunities.

In acknowledge and offer thanks for any compliments given and again take the opportu-nity to restate the practice making the right decision in choosing your practice because the kind of compliment is typical for your doctor and team.

Taking control
An open-ended question of, “What concerns do you have about the opportunity to contact imaging?” is now in order. This will let you evaluate the caller’s immediate needs. Take notes on your computer or a telephone information slip so you can share this information with your team members when this patient does come in for the first appointment.

At this point, you are in control of the call and the remaining information that you need should be easy to gather.

Financial and insurance information
We find it asking, “May I know how you will be taking care of the fee for your appointment?” an appropriate way to find out if this caller has dental benefits. Be prepared to discuss how you handle insurance, including what your patient’s other insurance and those who do not.

Other call topics
Of course, not all calls start with the prospect wanting to make an appointment. Many inquiries will be about procedures, costs, treatments, etc., especially when you are prepared for these different scenarios. Remember to always be positive. Describe what the practice does do, not what you will do. Your sales skills and active listening, showing empathy, speaking clearly and slowly, with sincere interest (not making it sound like you’ve said this 100 times that day) and focus will make an impression on these prospects.

Close the prospect in a similar technique bringing the call to a close of appointments you are offering.

As in, “Jerry Maguire,” when Renee Zellweger says to Tom Cruise, “You had me at hello,” you want your prospects to say the same thing at the end of the call.

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